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Washington, D.C. -- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has reported to the Office of Management and Budget that 99.7 percent of its mission critical computer software applications have been renovated to be Year 2000 compliant, including all payment-related applications and applications supporting health care.

Harold F. Gracey, Jr., Acting Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology said, "Our nation's veterans will continue to receive their benefits on time, as well as the highest quality of health care. In fact, our regular recurring benefit payments, including compensation and pension, most education programs, vocational rehabilitation, Restored Entitlement Program for Survivors, and those for Vietnam veterans' children with spina bifida, will be posted to beneficiaries' accounts and be available on the morning of December 30, 1999." Gracey said the early posting of these payments should "greatly relieve" any fear veterans may have about Year 2000 interruptions of benefit payments.

VA has renovated 99.7 percent of more than 300 applications supporting 11 mission critical system areas reflecting VA business functions, including compensation and pension, loan guaranty, insurance, and medical computer and corporate administration systems. The department also has validated (tested) 88 percent and has implemented into production 73 percent of the applications.

Renovation, which concerns the modification of an application to make it Year 2000 compliant, is the second of a simultaneous four-phase program VA has undertaken to resolve Year 2000 problems. The third phase, which validates new or changed code for date handling and functionality, is scheduled for completion in January 1999.

The implementation of all applications (the fourth phase) into production is scheduled by March 1999. VA completed the first phase, known as assessment, in January 1998.

VA has also completed implementation and closed out three of the 11 mission critical areas: the National Cemetery Administration, Financial Management and Vocational Rehabilitation.

Gracey said, "The Department strongly supports the Year 2000 Information and Readiness Disclosure Act recently signed into law by President Clinton. This disclosure initiative provides protections that will promote greater information sharing and enhance private and public sector efforts to ensure our nation's computer systems are ready for the new millennium. VA continues to aggressively work with manufacturers of biomedical equipment, telecommunication service providers and commercial off-the-shelf products used at VA facilities to get the information necessary to support Year 2000 compliance."